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ABSTRACT

Thirty-eight student teachers at a small liberal arts college in northeast New York completed questionnaires requiring them to rank the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about teaching in multicultural classrooms. Results revealed that student teachers approached their teaching methods very flexibly, recognizing that children learn in different ways. However, when questioned as to whether they would change their classroom materials, classroom management, or interactional styles according to children's sociocultural backgrounds, the student teachers were uncertain. They were particularly unsure about questions pertaining to curriculum goals and objectives and language diversity and teaching. Results are interpreted as evidence that teacher education programs need to do much more to help new teachers become "culturally responsive" to children's learning needs. The 30-item questionnaire is appended. (Contains 20 references.) (JDD)

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Novice Teachers' Thinking about Pedagogy in Multicultural Classrooms

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Northeastern Educational Research Association
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Abstract

We examined student teachers' beliefs about teaching in multicultural classrooms. Thirty-eight (N=38) student teachers participated in the study by completing a 30-item questionnaire requiring them to rank the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to statements about teaching in multicultural classrooms. Results of the study revealed that student teachers approached their teaching methods very flexibly, recognizing that children learn in different ways. However, when questioned more specifically as to whether they would change their classroom materials, classroom management or interactional styles according to children's socio-cultural backgrounds, the student teachers were uncertain. They were particularly unsure about questions pertaining to curriculum goals & objectives, and language diversity and teaching. The results of our findings are interpreted as evidence that teacher education programs need to do much more to help new teachers become "culturally responsive" to children's learning needs.

There is no more important issue in American education today than multiculturalism and its impact on schools. Increasingly, America has become more diverse in its ethnic and cultural composition. In many American communities the ethnic composition has changed from Western European to Asian, Middle-Eastern, African and South American ancestry. Within 20 years almost half of all school age youth in the United States will be children of color (Banks, 1994). For many United States' families, Spanish is their children's primary language, and English is a second language that is learned in school. Economic differences among people also characterize diversity in American life, and children now represent the largest group of people living in poverty today. Sadly, an increasing number of citizens now form an underclass that is being economically ostracized from mainstream American life.

The changing ethnic and cultural backgrounds of children has had tremendous impact upon schools. At the very least, American schools must offer a curriculum that stresses tolerance and respect for cultural and ethnic differences among people. Respect for social diversity is essential for children if they are to inherit a society that holds to the democratic ideals of equality and opportunity for all.

The linguistic and economic diversity of our school age population has already influenced school spending. Linguistic diversity has precipitated massive federal and state efforts to develop educational programs to ameliorate the many difficulties non-English speaking children have learning in school. The exponential growth of special education and remedial services is caused partly by the effects of poverty upon children's health, and their emotional and developmental well-being.

Change in the ethnic and cultural composition of today's school children has brought with it a wider range of attitudes and values about education. Although the public has historically valued and respected schooling, for some children this same value has lost its importance. Children, particularly the very poor, may now be indifferent or cynical about education when their family's experiences with schools have been negative or irrelevant. Recently immigrated children, who have never previously attended a school, may not understand the value of education or how education can be used to improve their opportunities in life. For some children who are marginalized from mainstream society by family income, race or language, school represents a perpetuation of existing social structures and inequities (Apple, 1982, Giroux and McLaren, 1986).

There is growing recognition among educators that an enlarging multicultural population has many implications for classroom pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994). Established methods of classroom teaching that may have seemed so effective in the past with culturally homogeneous groups of children may no longer work when students come from many ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Some cultural groups may have learning style preferences that are different than those of the mainstream population (Banks, 1994; Hudson, Bergin, and Chryst, 1993). Even conventional methods of turn-taking that occur during everyday classroom discussion may be foreign when children's home discourse experiences vary (Au and Mason, 1981).

We suspect that many prospective teachers lack insight into the life experiences of children growing up in contemporary American society. Indeed, one of the many problems facing American education is that our

classroom teachers do not reflect the ethnic, language or cultural backgrounds of the children they teach. Simply and frankly stated, the composition of today's pool of prospective teachers remains largely white and middle class while the students they serve are becoming more diverse.

New teachers must recognize that their students' cultural backgrounds will influence classroom teaching and learning. For example, the way in which teachers have traditionally relied upon homework will be far less effective with children who have no one at home to help them study. New teachers must learn that success in school is not always the "carrot" that previous generations cherished. In fact academic success has become a social stigma for students who belong to groups that are severely alienated from mainstream society (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Furthermore, ethnic and cultural differences between teachers and their students can too quickly degenerate into formidable social barriers that make teaching and learning difficult at best (McDermott, 1977).

Purpose of this study

In this paper we examined the beliefs of student teachers about teaching in multicultural classrooms. We wanted to learn if student teachers thought about the impact of ethnicity, language and economic backgrounds of children on classroom teaching. Two specific questions guided our research:

- Do student teachers think differently about their teaching methods for children of multicultural backgrounds?
- How do children's ethnic, economic and linguistic backgrounds affect student teachers' thoughts about teaching methods?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The belief that classroom pedagogy should change to fit children's life experiences and backgrounds is not new. "Begin with what the child knows," has been common knowledge of most classroom teachers for many years and this practical and everyday knowledge is supported by research. For15 years researchers have informed teachers about the impact of schemata on children's understanding of text and classroom tasks (Anderson, 1978), and schema theory has had tremendous implications for classroom teaching, particularly in terms of reading comprehension (Fielding and Pearson, 1994).

Studies of the effects of language differences and culture on classroom learning point to the need for "culturally responsive" teaching. Research has shown that teachers must be accepting of minority children's speaking styles because dialect is so intricately tied to children's cultural identity and sense of self (Labov, 1972).

Studies of children's socio-economic backgrounds have shown that children from middle income backgrounds often enter school having already acquired rich literacy experiences. More often than not, however, preschool children from impoverished backgrounds have 1000 fewer hours experience with books than their middle class counterparts (Adams, 1990), and poor children are far less likely to do well in school (Mehan, 1992). The great disparity in children's learning that is caused by poverty has stimulated the need for many kinds of intervention programs such as Head Start, Even Start and Follow-Through programs.

Research supports the value of "culturally responsive teaching" in multicultural classrooms. Teachers who are adaptive and "culturally

responsive" are more effective than those who are not. The best known of these studies is the Kamehameha Elementary Education Project (Au and Mason, 1981). Au and Mason found that teachers who allow children to speak in classroom discussions in ways that are similar to their socio-cultural communities produce greater reading achievment and more classroom participation than teachers who follow more rigid and mainstream methods of discussion.

Heath's research (1983) also supports culturally responsive methods of teaching. Heath found that teachers' classroom questioning styles were more similar to middle class families' styles of questioning than low-income families'. Classroom teachers, she explained, can be more effective when their styles of questioning more closely match children's discourse experiences at home. Similarly, Dillon (1986) found that a White male teacher in a rural secondary classroom can be more effective when the teacher modifies his methods of communication to fit his Black students.

Delpit (1988), Banks (1994) and Reyes (1989) have articulated the importance of changing classroom instruction to meet minority children's learning needs. Delpit (1988) complained that process approaches, like whole language, are really middle-class models of teaching designed to fit children who already know the communication code of mainstream society. Delpit contends that teachers need to teach surface skills of language to African-American children because the children will not learn them otherwise. Moreover, Delpit asserts that classroom management strategies are different when teaching African-American children than when teaching White children; African American children are accustomed

to direct and explicit styles of child-to-adult interaction, but if classroom role relationships between adult and child are not explicit in language, children will misinterpret teachers' expectations. Banks (1994), one of the most widely-known writers in multicultural/ethnic education, has argued that there is evidence that ethnicity alone may produce preferred styles of learning. He explained that "...the instructional strategies and learning styles most often favored in the nation's schools are inconsistent with the cognitive styles, cultural orientations, and cultural characteristics of some groups of students of color..." (Banks, 1994, p. 296). Similarly, Reyes (1989) stated that whole language does not work with language-minority children who need explicit instruction with language skills; Reyes argued that process approaches to literacy learning are ineffective for second language learners and illustrate the inadequacy of a "one size fits all" method of instruction that is so common in schools.

Recently, Bartolome (1994) provided a provocative argument against "culturally responsive teaching." Bartolome believes that educators have a "methods fetish" to explain how children learn, and often their "fetish" is tied to the newest fad in teaching that glosses over what is really important about classroom instruction, namely, the "humanization" of teaching. She argues that a search for cultural and ethnic congruity in teaching methods misses the point of finding meaningfulness for teaching and learning in classrooms. She contends that:

> The actual strengths of methods depend, first and foremost, on the degree to which they embrace a humanizing pedagogy that values the students' background knowledge, culture and life experiences, and

creates learning contexts where powers are shared by students and teachers. (p. 190)

Method

We developed and used a questionnaire (see attachment) consisting of 30 closed-items to conduct this study. Each of the question items required respondents to rank on a Likert scale, from 1 through 7, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the given statements. During the fall 1993 semester we piloted an earlier draft of the current questionnaire, and we refined it for this research project.

The questionnaire items for this study elicited the respondents' thoughts about teaching in multicultural classrooms and investigated whether student teachers would change their teaching methods to fit children's ethnicity, family and language backgrounds. Ten questionnaire items pertained to general teaching issues and diversity. An example of a general question item is the following: "Teachers should teach basically the same way, regardless of their students' ethnicity, family or language backgrounds." Other general items asked whether all children learn basically the same way, whether curriculum goals and objectives should be changed for multicultural populations, if teachers should change their communication styles for different populations of students, and whether family background, gender, or language/dialect influenced students' learning. Twenty questionnaire items were more specific, asking whether teachers would change their teaching methods, reading materials, management strategies or communication styles when teaching children from diverse family backgrounds, ethnic groups or language backgrounds.

We administered the questionnaire to 38 student teachers on the

evening preceding the start of their fall student teaching experience. All the respondents were undergraduate and graduate student teachers at a small liberal arts college in northeast New York, and all of them were elementary education majors. We prepared descriptive statistics and frequency rankings to analyze the data for this study.

Results

We first analyzed the student teachers' responses by comparing frequency rankings for each of the questionnaire items. We used 50% as our criteria to evaluate the group's beliefs about each of the questionnaire items. If 50% or more of the students ranked themselves a 1 or 2, we judged those responses as indicating strong disagreement. Similarly, if 50% of their responses were 6 or 7 on the Likert scale, we judged those responses as indicating strong agreement. When 50% of the student teachers' responses were in the middle range of 3, 4 or 5 on the 7-point questionnaire scale, we used that as our criteria that the group was unsure of how to answer the questionnaire item.

Results of our analyses suggested more uncertainty about culturally responsive teaching than not. The student teachers answered that they were unsure about their beliefs to 15 of the 30 questionnaire items; that is, they rated themselves 3 or 4 or 5 on the rating scale to 15 of the questionnaire items. In addition, their questionnaire rankings were evenly distributed, without a consensus, on eight other questionnaire items.

We found that the student teachers held strong points of view about eight of the questionnaire items. They strongly disagreed with seven questionnaire items (#'s 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 14) and they displayed strong agreement with one (#30). The student teachers strongly disagreed with

items about teaching the same way regardless of children's backgrounds; they felt similarly to the item about all children learning the same way. The student teachers also displayed strong disagreement about gender differences influencing children's learning of math and science. They did not believe that language differences should impact children's learning. And they showed strong disagreement about using the same materials regardless of children's backgrounds.

We prepared a content analysis for those items where the student teachers strongly disagreed and this is displayed in the following Table.

Insert Table about here

The student teachers strongly agreed with one item about multiculturalism (#30) in which they believed children should study how people are more alike than different; twenty-one of the 38 student teachers rated this item a 6 or 7 on the Likert scale:

> The primary purpose of teaching multicultural perspectives in my classroom will be for children to see how we are all alike.

Student teachers' responses to eight of the questionnaire items (5, 8, 15, 18, 19, 22, 28, and 29) were broadly spread over the 7 point rating scale making it impossible to identify a group pattern of disagreement or agreement. These items pertained to the questions about the impact of family backgrounds (#5) and ethnicity (#8) on success in school, changing reading materials to fit children's family backgrounds (#15), using the same classroom management strategies regardless of children's

backgrounds, ethnicity and language (#18), using the same management strategies regardless of family and language background (#19), using the same academic goals and objectives regardless of family backgrounds, ethnicity or language (#22); requiring limited English proficiency students to only use English in classrooms (#28), and using muliticulturalism (#29) to see how we are all different.

We also analyzed the fifteen questionnaire items where student teachers indicated they were unsure as to whether they agreed or disagreed. Fifty percent of the student teachers answered that they were unsure of how to respond to the items pertaining to speaking styles (items #10,11,12, 13). Similarly, 50% of the student teachers indicated they were unsure of how to respond to two question items about changing reading materials to fit children's language backgrounds (#16) and ethnicity (#17). Additionally, a third item pertaining to classroom reading materials (#15) reflected a broad spread over the Likert scale that lacked a clear consensus about the question stem. The student teachers revealed uncertainty about adapting management strategies to fit children's backgrounds (#20 & 21) and their answers lacked a clear pattern on two items (#18 and 19). Student teachers were also uncertain about the questions pertaining to curriculum goals and objectives; on four of these items it was revealed that 50% of respondents indicated they were unsure (item #'s 23,24,25, and 26) and on an additional item about goals and objectives (#22) their answers were broadly spread without a clear pattern of agreement or disagreement.

The question items about non-English or limited-English speaking children confused our student teachers. Sixty-six (66%) percent of the

student teachers indicated that they were unsure about whether English should take precedence in learning (#27). The item about only allowing LEP students to use English in classrooms (#28) revealed a lack of consensus with student teachers' answers broadly spread over the Likert scale. The general item about language and dialect differences impacting children's success in school (#7) also revealed that the student teachers were unsure, with 50% of them scoring the item a 3, 4 or 5 on the rating scale.

The student teachers' responses to this questionnaire about teaching in multicultural classrooms revealed more uncertainty than confidence. They indicated they did not strongly agree or disagree with half of the questionnaire items and an additional eight items reflected no specific response pattern. The student teachers held strong points of view on the general items about the need to teach differently in multicultural classrooms to meet children's learning needs. However, when given specific information pertaining to ethnicity, community background or language their responses lacked consensus.

Discussion

We consider the results of this study a beginning with our understanding of teachers' thoughts about teaching in multicultural classrooms. When asked about whether they would teach differently to accommodate children's learning needs, the majority of the student teachers indicated they would be flexible in their teaching methods. Their responses to the questionnaire suggested that when speaking generally, they would change their pedagogy to fit children's socio-cultural backgrounds, and that they believe that children learn in different ways.

Uncertainty characterized many of the student teachers' responses to the questionnaire. Although the majority of student teachers indicated that they would modify their instruction to meet children's varied learning needs, when specifically asked about ethnicity, community background or language, the student teachers appeared unsure. It is quite likely that they had never previously considered the influence of culture on classroom teaching before this questionnaire. Their methods coursework may not have addressed complex issues of pedagogy and culture. There is already so much required information in teacher education courses, particularly about content specific methods, classroom management, lesson and unit planning, that there simply is not enough time in these courses to address the many complexities involved in the interaction between culture and teaching. This omission in our education program, if it proves to be true, might well be a serious deficiency in the preparation of teachers in a multicultural society.

Throughout the questionnaire the student teachers displayed uncertainty about teaching children whose primary language is other than English. On all eight questionnaire items pertaining to language differences in classrooms, the student teachers indicated they were unsure about which course of action to take. Even the items about allowing children with limited proficiency in English to use their primary language in their classrooms, which we thought student teachers would agree with, revealed uncertainty. It seems that second language questions are more puzzling to student teachers than questions about other educational issues. Yet issues about children whose primary language is not English have become increasing important in schools where many

immigrant children are in attendance.

The student teachers exhibited additional confusion about items pertaining to curriculum goals and objectives for children with multicultural backgrounds. When we were developing the questionnaire we reasoned that curriculum goals and objectives should be the same for all children, regardless of ethnicity or cultural backgrounds. However, the student teachers did not answer as we expected. Their answers suggested a general confusion with these items. We believe that all children should have equal access to the same curriculum, otherwise schools will continue to perpetuate the social inequities we already have in society. We need to impart this belief to our student teachers.

Bartolome's (1994) argument against a "methods fetish" is an interesting one, and one that we support to some extent. Certainly, teaching methods are less important than a humanizing pedagogy or philosophical framework to empower children as learners. We also agree that methods must be "situated in students' cultural experiences." We think, however, that there are specific instructional strategies that teachers can implement to help empower students and democratize their classroom learning experiences. Minimizing the value of "culturally responsive teaching" will unnecessarily allow new teachers to wander about the complexities of classroom teaching by trial and error until they find something that works for them. In those circumstances we believe novice teachers would only regress to teaching methods gleaned from how they were taught when in school, and this would not meet the needs of today's multicultural society.

We know that there are specific instructional strategies that can

foster children's learning in multicultural classrooms, and new teachers need to learn them. Ultimately, effective classroom instruction depends on teachers and students establishing mutual respect and value for one another. Certain teaching methods allow for children's voices to be heard. We recommend the following as a start:

- Teachers must value and respect children's cultural backgrounds by creating opportunities for children to share their life experiences during classroom discussions and cooperative learning opportunities.

- Children whose primary language is other than English should be permitted to use their native language in classrooms so that academic content can be learned. These children should be given many opportunities to interact with peers who can share their content knowledge and language skills with them.
- Management differences must be taken into consideration when teaching children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers must be explicit in their behavioral expectations so that children understand meanings that would otherwise be understood only through nuance.
- Classroom materials should reflect not only the dominant culture of our society but also children's cultural backgrounds. Classroom libraries should not

perpetuate cultural hegemony.

- Classroom pedagogy must accommodate children's varied learning styles, particularly learning styles that are due to cultural differences. One method of accomplishing this is to move toward child-centered instruction. Recently one of our cooperating teachers shared an interesting aphorism, TIC-TAC-TOE, that illustrates this point: TIC refers to instruction where the "teacher is at the center." TAC refers to "teachers and children" working collaboratively on learning activities. TOE identifies the goal of having the "teacher on the edge," facilitating children's learning as they engage in independent and collaborative learning activities with others. A method that allows teachers to be "on the edge" will minimize miscommunication and mistrust that might otherwise develop when teachers and students come from many different socio-cultural backgrounds.

In future studies we will compare the responses of experienced teachers to the same questionnaire and interview individuals from both groups to discover information that might be hidden by the questionnaire method used in this study.

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Table 1 Questionnaire Items where 50% of the student teachers strongly disagreed

1 = strongly agree	4 = unsure	7 = strongly disagree

Item #	Questionnaire Stem
1.	Teachers should teach basically the same way, regardless of their students' ethnicity, family or language backgrounds (30/38 rated the item 1 or 2).
2.	All children, regardless of their ethnicity, family and language backgrounds effectively learn from the same teaching methods (33/38 rated the item 1 or 2).
3.	Curriculum goals and objectives should be the same for all children regardless of students' ethnicity, family or language backgrounds (34 rated the item 1 or 2).
4.	Teachers should use the same communication style regardless of children's ethnicity, family or language backgrounds. (27/38 rated the item 1 or 2)
6.	Gender differences greatly impact children's learning of math and science (23/38 rated the item 1 or 2).
7.	Language and dialect differences greatly impact children's success in school (20 rated the item 1 or 2).
14.	I plan to use the same reading materials regardless of children's family, community background and ethnicity (23/38 rated the item a 1 or 2).

Appendix

Questionnaire

Please rate the following items on this questionnaire on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 7 indicating that you strongly agree.

1= strongly disagree 4= unsure 7 = strongly agree

1. Teachers should teach basically the same way, regardless of their students' ethnicity, family or language backgrounds.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. All children, regardless of their ethnicity, family and language backgrounds effectively learn from the same teaching methods.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Curriculum goals and objectives should be the same for all children, regardless of students' ethnicity, family or language backgrounds.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Teachers should use the same communication style regardless of children's ethnicity, family or language backgrounds.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1= strongly disagree *4= unsure* *7 = strongly agree*

5. Children's family backgrounds have the greatest impact, among all factors, in their success in school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Gender differences greatly impact on children's learning of math and science.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Language and dialect differences greatly impact children's success in school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. Children's ethnic identities greatly impact their success in school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Schools allow all students equal opportunity for academic success, regardless of children's home background, ethnicity or language.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I plan to use the same speaking style when teaching, regardless of children's family and cultural backgrounds, ethnicity or language.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1= strongly disagree *4= unsure* *7 = strongly agree*

11. I plan to change my speaking styles when teaching children from family and community backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I plan to change speaking styles when teaching children with language and dialect backgrounds that are different from my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I plan to change speaking styles when teaching children with ethnic backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I plan to use the same reading materials regardless of children's family and community backgrounds and ethnicity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I plan to change reading materials according to children's family and community backgrounds.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1= strongly disagree 4= unsure 7 = strongly agree

16. I plan to change reading materials according to children's language and dialect backgrounds.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I plan to change reading materials according to children's ethnic backgrounds.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I plan to use the same classroom management strategies regardless of children's family and language backgrounds, or their ethnicity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I plan to change my classroom management strategies when children come from family and community backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. I plan to change my classroom management stategies when children are from ethnic backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I plan to change my management strategies when children come from language and dialect backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1= strongly disagree 4= unsure 7 = strongly agree

22. My academic goals and objectives will remain the same for all my students, regardless of their family backgrounds, ethnicity or languages.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. I plan to change academic goals and objectives when teaching children who come from family backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I plan to change my academic goals and objectives when teaching children who come from language backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I plan to change my academic goals and objectives when teaching children who come from ethnic backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. I plan to change my academic goals and objectives when teaching children who come from family and cultural backgrounds that are different than my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1= strongly disagree 4= unsure 7 = strongly agree

27. Learning English should take precedence over learning the subject areas for children with limited proficiency in English.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. Children with limited proficiency in English should be encouraged to only use English when in my classroom.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. The primary purpose of teaching multicultural perspectives in my classroom will be for children to see how we are all different.

1 2^^^Document Error^^^